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ABSTRACT

Four types of classrooms are described in relation to individual child development, particularly the learning aspect of development. The first type of classroom is the normative grade school, which operates on the premise that people should be essentially alike rather than different. The second classroom is the behavioral competency school, which uses a heavy reinforcement system. Some of the negative and positive features of competency-based education are examined. A third type of classroom is the Piagetian School, which is baed on Piaget's developmental theories. The major principles of Piaget are relevant for the development of a broad, comprehensive approach to early childhood education. The final classroom is the Free School and the Open School, which is characterized by almost unlimited freedom. A broad comprehensive repertoire of approaches is essential in early childhcod development because of the vast variety of human needs that exist in any particular classroom. (DB)

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SESSION IV

Presentation: Friday Morning

Chairman : Dr. Michael Auleta, Chairman
Early Childhood Department
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Speaker : Dr. Joe Frost

ISSUES AND CONCERNS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

I would like to follow through on some of the issues, concerns, and directions initiated by Dr. Gordon, Dr. Ray, and Dr. Weikart, and talk with you about putting programs into a child development perspective, particularly the learning aspect of development. And, for that purpose, I would like to describe a number of schools for children in an effort to help us all understand better some of the major considerations that we need to take into account as we work with young children.

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Not too long ago, there was a program on television--one of the popular series called "Night Gallery." On this particular program, a man died and went to the appropriate place to gain admittance. After sitting there for a while, he was concerned, of course, about where he would go. He was taken into a room which did not look too bad, since he was expecting the "fiery furnace." He saw wildly flowered patterned wallpaper on the walls. This really turned him off and he felt very bad. He said, "What a context. But, I can stand this. I am sure there are a lot of other people

in Heaven and it is not so bad." Then he started around the room and began to meet other people. One couple immediately began to show him their vacation slides. They began to chatter over and over about what they had done. Their selection of slides reached all the way from the ceiling to the floor. They were showing these over and over and chattering wildly, and he could not even get a word in. This was unbearable to him. Incidentally, to describe this young man--he had long hair, wore a modish type of very unusual clothing, used hip language, and he was, in the terms of some, "a real swinging guy." He went over to another part of the room and met another couple and they began talking to him about the weather. He couldn't bear this either--it was very painful for him. He saw a record player and a huge collection of records. He thought, "I'll go out of my mind if I have to deal with these people for very long, so I'll find my own way by using these records." But, unfortunately, he found that these records were all the Guy Lombardo type--the slow, swinging tunes of the thirties. This really drove him out of his mind. He began to shout and scream and asked to be let out of there. As he was screaming and shouting, one of the caretakers came in and told him, "You are in Hell and you didn't expect it to be all roses, did you?" He said, "Yeah, but how about these other people in here? They seem to be enjoying themselves so much." The caretaker said, "Well, they are in Heaven."

So the point is here that one situation doesn't have the same meaning for everybody. One person's heaven may be another person's hell, and one person's hell may be another person's heaven. I think

we need to keep that in mind as I elaborate on a point that is fundamental in education--individual differences. It is no less relevant today than it ever was. But, the simple fact is that even though every teacher you ever meet, every professor you ever meet, professes, at least theoretically, the notion of individuality in teaching and working with people. But, we have yet to achieve this concept of individuality in practice. I think that part of the reason for this is that we have become oriented to "either-or-ism." It's got to be either one approach or another. I find that this permeates not only the thinking of teachers in the classroom but too often, the thinking, writing, and certainly, the speaking of many of us at conferences around the country. It seems that we want to get on the popular notions, that we want to poke little jibes at those people who don't happen to be on the particular upswing at the moment. I must confess that I am just as likely to do this as anyone else. I think that it is probably, in part at least, unfortunate.

The Normative-Grade School

So let's turn to the notion of individuality and weigh types of programs against concepts of human development, particularly learning, that are available to all of us. Let's consider first of all one child. Let's call this child Jimmy. He is in a classroom (it doesn't matter whether it is preschool, primary, or elementary). He learns very quickly the importance of grouping. He is likely to be placed in one of three reading groups commonly called among the professions, "the redbirds, the bluebirds and the peckerwoods." Groupings such as these are based on normative notions. Notions that people should be essentially alike

rather than different tend to permeate this kind of classroom. It is a classroom where letter grades are assigned, where promotion and retention are in vogue. In southern Texas, for example, 80% of the Mexican-American children failed first grade during the early sixties. Now, can you imagine a child who has only been alive for six years failing the first grade? First grade is a place where considerable emphasis is given to chronological age rather than to what has happened to a child during the span of time over which he has lived. Emphasis on chronological age considerations, it seems to me, is horribly archaic. The chronological age has never said anything about what a teacher should prepare or what a teacher should provide and do in regard to instructing a youngster. Yet, we continue to rely upon some of these outmoded notions. We continue to get questions from teachers everywhere, such as: "I teach a third-grade class. In my class, I have a youngster who was promoted from the second grade, but I find that he can't do the third grade work." I asked a group of several hundred teachers one day to spend 10 to 15 minutes defining third grade. They set their minds to this task and eventually came up with a definition--that the third grade is where you teach the basal third-grade reader. And, that is the best we could do. Unfortunately, the basal reading program has had more to say about how teachers teach in American schools in the past several years than have the teachers themselves. It is used in 90% of the classrooms in the country--truly a national curriculum. So, prescriptions made in advance by people elsewhere have tended to set the pattern of our primary schools. It would be horribly unfortunate, I believe, if we were to de-

velop our emerging early childhood programs in Florida, Texas, or wherever, after these patterns. Grade level standards, letter grading, basal readers, grouping techniques on the basis of standardized tests, do not have the power to make instructional decisions. We have simply tended to use these in a perverted way. And, this is having its effect on the learning and development of children everywhere. We cannot identify clear, valid ties from what is known about human development to these particular features.

I believe that much of the base of these features comes directly from what is commonly referred to as normative maturational psychology. Normative refers to the tendency to draw patterns of development for a particular chronological age on the basis of averages much as Arnold Gesell did for many years. The misinterpretations of Gesell and others who have prepared developmental schedules led in part to this state of affairs. For example, some of these developmental schedules spell out for a particular child, let's say a child 21 months of age, that he should be so many inches around the waist, should have a stride of so many inches, should be able to stack a tower of blocks so many high, that he must have certain assistance in going to the toilet. These kinds of characteristics are all familiar to you. Then at 24 months of age, miraculously the child is different. He has gained an inch or two around the waist, he steps farther in his stride, he can walk up the stairs unaided, and so on. I believe that this is charting not just the path of a normal child or an average child, whatever that is, but it is also charting the path of a mythical child. Drawing curriculum implications from normative considerations is having terribly detrimental effects

on American education.

The second part of this particular view about learning, the maturational view, was discussed very well be Dr. Gordon last night. The notion that we are born with inherent potentiality and there is nothing we can do about it. Again, nonsense! We know a great deal better than this. Yet, in spite of knowing better, we continue to find in school after school, in classroom after classroom, that this is the pattern upon which we tend to base many of our practices. Now, I know that it is currently popular to take off on teachers and give them a bad time. I simply want to reiterate that I believe the normative maturational view is doing great harm in American education. Practices which are obviously drawn from these views are outmoded and in need of revision. We should be very careful lest we allow the developing early childhood programs in our states to emerge from these points of view.

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The Behavorial Competency School

Then I would like to look at a second child. Let's call this child Mary. Mary is enrolled in a classroom (whatever level, it does not matter) where they use behavorial objectives, performances, or competencies. The teachers and administrators have flow charts on the walls. They have computer computer outputs plastered around the principal's office on which to base scheduling decisions. They use a heavy reinforcement system. You go into the classroom and find that many of the children are happy to be getting M&M candy, Froot Loops or some other kind of concrete reward. This pattern is a more specialized kind of education. It tends to be drawn directly and indirectly

from the notions of B. F. Skinner. This kind of classroom is currently in vogue particularly in the context of college and university teacher education programs.

At every level of education we find that principles of task analysis, behavorial objectives, hierarchies in learning, etc., are beginning to get a very firm foothold. The usual analysis of competency-based education is pretty negative in nature. I would like to examine some of the negative features. Then I would like to also place these into perspective by pointing to some of the positive features.

I think first of all, that American educators are becoming obsessed with objectives, particularly behavorial objectives. It is a kind of bandwagon affair. We find that all over the nation, colleges and universities are moving toward performance-based or competency-based education. The process begins by taking a body of curriculum and identifying the broad assumptions in an attempt to avoid gross overlaps and gaps. And, then through the use of task analysis and sequencing, we break this down to intermediate-type objectives and finally into such specific-type objectives that regardless of who states the objective other people would be able to understand it. On the one hand, we would have an objective on a broad level like teaching a kid to read. On the other hand, at the very specific level, the objective might read, "Each child will be able to identify the short vowel sound in a one-syllable word." Now, in regard to the broad objectives, we would have considerable disagreement as to what we are talking about. In regard to the second, we would be pretty much in agreement from a

communication viewpoint. The specific objective is used not only to set the pattern for the curriculum and to set the teaching tone and direction of the curriculum, but also for evaluation.

Now, I have great concern about this. In our state and perhaps in yours and in some others, they are beginning to talk about a "catalog of competencies" to be administered at the state level. I am concerned about who is going to administer the competencies that I am going to teach because I am not at all clear at all times on what they are. I become more concerned when I visit some of the USOE model development universities. These represent some of the largest teacher education universities in the country. Even these model developers have not been able to implement the programs. In other words, we have no research base upon which to place our faith in performance-based education at the present time. There have been some small studies that have shown the positive results between small groups of performance and non-performance-based students. But, I wonder about the appropriateness of the entire country moving in this direction simultaneously. Furthermore, I am concerned that the objectives are generally stated in terms of the lower memory skills, and rarely in terms of the higher order or affective skills. I believe with Piaget that affectivity and cognition are inseparable and irreducible. But, how are we going to bring the critical higher intellectual processes and affective considerations into proper perspective?

I am also concerned about the renewal aspect of these competencies that a group of people elsewhere can take my program and weigh it against a group of competencies that may be in Michigan State's of Stanford's

filing cabinet. A Committee of 30 is about to be established in the State of Texas to make rulings and decisions about all emerging teacher education programs in that state. All new programs will be performance based beginning in the fall of 1973. By 1976 or 1977, all existing programs must come into compliance. Who is going to make these decisions? Is the Committee of 30 going to develop a set of competencies and then weigh my program against them? Or, are they going to take a more appropriate tack of weighing the cognitive versus the affective, as well as determining the uniqueness of the people who are involved in our program?

Another concern I have is that overemphasizing the ends of education may do harm to the means or procedures of education. Dewey pointed out in his work, time after time, that the ends and means of education are inseparable. But, nevertheless, at the present time, we seem to be giving our attention to the ends without due attention to the means of education. It seems to me that for any given end, there is a variety of means for achieving that end. Let me give an illustration. Consider that you want to teach a child the basic colors. For teaching this particular end--the ability to identify the basic colors--the teacher could select a variety of chips from the Peabody kit. She could sit down with the children and say, "Okay, children, say it after me--'This is red.'" And, all the children would say, "This is red." Then she would say, "Children, this is blue." And, they all repeat after her, "This is blue." "Very good. Now you get a Froot Loop." Then she says, "Repeat after me--," and, she goes on and on. Are the children likely to be able to learn through this procedure how to identify the basic colors? Indeed, they are likely to be

able to learn this particular skill--that is, to achieve this particular outcome on the basis of the criterion the teacher established in advance.

On the other hand, another teacher working toward the same end, might very well set up some easels over in the corner and put red, yellow, and blue paint in those easels. Knowing that one child already knows the colors, already is rather sophisticated about this, she could place this child with an unknowing child, in regard to the colors, and get them working together. I would suggest that in this particular context also, the child is likely to achieve the particular desired end of identifying the basic colors. But, in addition to achieving that particular end, there are so many bonus features in this means. For example, there could be a multi-cultural situation between the children involved. The activity could have built into it these critical affective considerations that you are not so likely to get if you simply sit down and say to a child, "Now repeat after me." So, if we are concerned about the preservation of children's good feelings, if we are concerned about affectivity in human development, then I see no recourse but for us to be concerned with the means that we select for the achivement of the ends that we desire. I would suggest further that we need to begin to give some attention to the establishment of criteria for the selection of means, just as we are now going all out in developing criteria for the selection of ends.

In respect to the people who are building performance-based programs (and that is a considerable number of people), let me say in regard to positive features that not all that you hear about the negative side of performanc-based education should be taken at face value. For example, you commonly hear that individuals who are concerned with performance-

based education, are concerned only with a bite-sized curriculum. This is an over-simplification. It is not only an over-simplification of what some people are doing, but it is certainly an over-simplification of the best knowledge that is availabe to us.

In regard to the establishment of learning hierarchies, for example, Piaget has pointed out that the sequence of learning is invariant. That is, that all people, except perhaps some severely damaged persons, appear to go through broad stages of development within which we can determine, with some fair degree of precision, the nature of tasks that are required in a particular stage for a youngster to be able to advance to the next more complex stage. If we accept this invariance of sequence then we tend to be obligated to take the leap of faith from the knowledge of how people learn to how people can be helped in the learning process. We can go about developing sequences of learning tasks, and we can communicate these sequences to other people.

A critical factor in regard to the use of sequences is what Hunt refers to as the problem of the match; that is, determining at what developmental level the child is working through diagnostic processes, developing or selecting a curriculum sequence, building a repertoire of teaching strategies, and finally, putting these into a dynamic teacher-child encounter in ways that ensure a developmental "match" between the three variables.

The learning or curriculum sequence can be communicated to other people and it does not have to be simply a bite-sized sequence. It has been pointed out repeatedly through research on transfer of training, that there is more than just one way of going through a given sequence.

Some children, it appears, do indeed profit from the bite-sized sequence. Other children tend to transfer from related areas and get into the sequence in ways that we are not so clear about. Furthermore, it appears that many children can be placed within a broad problem area--reading, for example, may be the body of knowledge or the mental process involved at the moment. We can place many children into a rich environment where there are things, where there are books, where there are book activities, where the teacher is reading to the children every day, where they use experience charts--a broad approach that is not specifically tied to bits and pieces. Many children who are placed within such a system are able, because of their exploratory powers, to bring order and meaning to the hierarchy of tasks which serve to make up that reading process. We are not at all clear on how this takes place. We are becoming a bit clearer, however, about factors that relate to the type of youngster who is more likely to engage successfully in the bits and pieces classroom or the bits and pieces style versus the transfer style or the less structured style or the more flexible style. It appears that the youngster who is disorganized, who uses less complex language, who seems to be poorly motivated, who is sometimes referred to as severely disadvantaged, is likely to profit from some of the bits and pieces structure. Such diversity of learning style <u>does not</u> invalidate the notion of learning hierarchies for in either approach the broader concepts are constructed from subordinate concepts.

Once again, what is heaven to one child may be hell to another. So, as we make decisions about programs, it seems to me that we are

going to continue to be off the track if we continue to operate on the unfounded notion that in some way we should adopt a program and adapt that program to all our children. I think we will continue to be disappointed, particularly in our increasingly diverse classrooms that are being developed through integration of ethnic and socio-economic groups, so long as we rely on either-or-ism in education.

In regard to the reinforcement aspect of stimulus-response theory, it is very popular to lambast anything that smacks of token giving. At the present time, I am not at all sure but what some children need tokens, concrete reinforcement to help them get going. The unfortunate thing happens to be the overgeneralization from reinforcement theory. Whenever you work with a group of teachers in a workshop of one or two days on reinforcement theory, you may go back and find that the rewards are being used indiscriminately. The teacher has set up all of these arrangements for rewarding all her children, whether the particular reward is appropriate or not. Concrete reinforcement, like other major curriculum processes must be individualized, relevant to a particular child, and must be used with more than casual care by teachers. My experiments in low-income minority schools, lead me to believe that the correction of faulty teaching can replace the need for concrete rewards and lead to the more desirable intrinsic motivation.

The Piagetian School

I would like to move to a third kind of classroom based on Piaget's developmental theories. Dr. Weikart's program, Dr. Gordon's program to some extent, and a variety of other programs are drawing heavily from Piagetian theory. My belief is that Piaget, at the present time, has more

to offer in terms of a comprehensive developmental theory than any other living person, particularly for early childhood education. It is a very comprehensive, relatively speaking, theory. And it is very appropriate to the needs of early childhood educators. We can do a whole lot worse than to place a great deal of our stake in the kind of work that Piaget has been doing. So I do not really have deep-seated criticism to impose on the curricula that is being developed from Piagetian theory. A word of caution is in order, however, in regard to the work of some who are attempting to accelerate children through the developmental stages by the provision of intensive, highly structured instruction.

Piaget has taken exception to this on numerous occasions and points out that he is more concerned with the broadening of mental structures than with the vertical acceleration of mental structures. Of course, the major over-riding implication of this view is that the classroom would be developed on the basis of the more informal, open style classroom, rather than the structured, step-by-step approach. Since some children appear to profit from a bit-by-bit, step-by-step sequence, the typical open classroom concept may not be appropriate for all children.

A second concern about Piagetian classrooms is that we might center upon the attachment of chronological age equivalents to broad developmental scales. Considerable damage could result from such misinterpretation, similar to that resulting from the misinterpretation of the chronological age related developmental scales of Arnold Gesell. Finally, the interpreters of Piaget should be wary lest they attach un-

due credit to maturation at the expense of nurture or teaching, for Piaget has pointed out that he believes that children should largely be left alone to structure their own learning environment.

The major principles of Piaget are relevant for the development of a broad, comprehensive approach to early childhood education. The sequence of development is invariant, the rate and timing of movement through this sequence is highly variant, and there is more than one major factor responsible for development, (maturation, experience, social transmission, and equilibration), and we are concerned with the inner drives of children as well as external forces.

The Free School and The Open School

The fourth and final classroom is characterized by almost unlimited freedom. Let's call this the free school. There are over a thousand free schools in existence in the United States at the present time and they are growing, but the failure rate is high. Jonathan Kozol, who has been instrumental in the development of the free school movement, pointed out in Saturday Review recently, that he is concerned about the short-lived nature of these schools, and he believes that part of the reason for this is that people in the movement tend to view the teacher as somehow destructive. He does not believe that this is consistent with the kind of a world that children are living in at the present time.

The New School at the University of North Dakota is, in the minds of some, a free school--more aptly labeled upon school for it seems to be a bit more structured than the so-called free school. At the university level and in the classrooms for children, the students work with

considerable freedom. The New School is touted by Silberman in Crisis in the Classroom and many others as being the most exciting teacher training program in the country at the present time. It is exciting because of the creative elements that are built in, because of the kind of freedom that is involved, because of the self-direction that is evident, and for a number of additional reasons. In one room of the New School we talked with a young woman who was working at a pottery wheel. We asked her what kind of work she was doing in the school, and she said that she wasn't even a student, that she was there because she enjoyed the atmosphere, and was "trying to find herself." Many of the young people who are "trying to find themselves" are attracted to this kind of open atmosphere. She said that she did intend to enroll, however, when she was able to make enough money. We went into classrooms and found that indeed discussion was open with the students taking a great deal of the initiative. The students (I understand) select the teachers and courses and they may abandon them whenever they feel the need. On the spur of the moment, someone may come through and say, "We are having a distinguished speaker downstairs," and the class will break up and go downstairs and sit around the fire and talk about a topic of mutual interest. I think you get the picture.

The open school, more structured than the free school, is exemplified by the British Infant Schools and by many programs based on Dewey's philosophy that were in operation in this country from the 30's through the 50's. I taught at the University of Arkansas Laboratory School for several years in an elementary school classroom

that was operated on these bases. We had vertical age grouping and reported to parents rather than assigning grades. There was not a single set of basal readers in the school. The setting was highly informal. The children engaged in cooperative planning every morning. I can say firsthand that I am excited about this kind of environment for most children. But this open classroom concept in which we were engaging seemed to have been damaging to some of our children, particularly to three boys that I recall. We determined that these three boys tended to follow a kind of pattern, as we checked into their home lives. They came from professional homes in which they were given almost ultimate freedom. They could throw food at the table, swear at their parents, or shout and scream. They had no obligations or responsibilities. They came to our school and were asked immediately at the kindergarten level to "Sit down, kids, join the group and start planning for your life." They went all the way through to the upper levels (10, 11 and 12 year olds were in my particular class at that time) without ever having been helped systematically by adults to develop a more orderly form of behavior. A classroom teacher from Missouri came into the classroom one day after I had been there about three months and said, "You're having a great deal of difficulty with 'Jimmy,' aren't you?" I said, "Yes, you noticed." It was pretty obvious. He had threatened to kill one of the student teachers and regularly coerced them, especially the little, petite ones. He kept them scared out of their minds because he was big and they were afraid of him. This day he had gone into one of his temper tantrums in the classroom. We had again explained, "Now, Jimmy, you shouldn't do this," and had discussions about

this and that. She said, "I know what is wrong with that youngster. Your classroom provides too much freedom for Jimmy to develop any degree of responsibility and structure and meaning for his life. He needs strong adult guidance." So we took a different tack. And we followed through with the parents. I won't describe the tack, but it involved considerably more adult direction for the youngster. We also began the development of more structure for his curriculum. By the end of the year things had changed for Jimmy. He was a different kind of youngster. In the report to the parents, the teachers were able to say that he was a delight to work with. And indeed he was.

A couple of other children were finally sent to psychiatrists to help them get their heads together. In both cases, the psychiatrist recommended a more structured, more adult-directed home and school environment. I think it is terribly unfortunate to assume that the open concept classroom or the free concept classroom is necessarily the best structure for all. I think that it is highly irresponsible to assume that you can take the pattern that has been established by people elsewhere and expect that it will fit your particular classroom with all your children. Both the open and the free schools, which have implicit and explicit ties to humanistic psychology, are relevant alternatives for some people. We do indeed need to pull away from the normative maturational view, where we are working essentially on making people more alike. We also need to reject the concept that people can do anything they want. Both views have some possibly damaging consequences. I would suggest that the most effective teacher and the most effective program is the one that is able to interpret the broad knowledge of human development in an effort to

build in the kinds of curriculum that would be most appropriate for a particular child. We are talking essentially about individualization.

A broad comprehensive repertoire of approaches is essential in early childhood development because of the vast variety of human needs that exist in any particular classroom. One of my colleagues, a biochemist, Roger Williams (not the pianist), recently wrote the book entitled, You Are Extraordinary, in which he pointed out that every human being on earth is different (something we all knew already). But he went further to explain how we are different. He pointed out that each person on earth is different from every other person on earth in almost every conceivable way. Our fingerprints are the most obvious way. The hair on our head is a less obvious way. Our voice prints can now track us just as surely as our fingerprints. Even our kiss prints are different from the other. So in human physiology and behavior, individuality is the rule--the constant. We must return to this fundamental assumption until individuality is expressed in classroom practice.

We are also concerned that the curriculum have a humanistic base but I am not at all sure that the so-called humanists are necessarily the humanists at all times. I would suggest that in a specific situation, in regard to a particular child, that Skinner may be the humanist. I would suggest that in some instances, Piaget may be the humanist. I would suggest that in some instances, Maslow may be the humanist. Simply because we label ourselves humanists does not mean that we are the most humane people or that our particular approach would be the most humane approach for all youngsters. If we are going to use our hearts and our minds and our skills in education to build a relevant curriculum for every child,

we cannot simply place our faith in the either-or-ism that prevails in education at all levels at the present time.